

**MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

**AGENDA ITEM 6**

**QUESTION 1**

**MRS MARY NICHOLLS** will ask the following question:

Can the Portfolio Holder please advise why surveyors have been working on the allotment site at Hag Corner, Highley? Enquiries from both the Parish Council and myself have failed to elicit any response, and this is just a matter of weeks after our garage site was flagged for demolition by Shropshire Council and included in our Place Plan - with absolutely no consultation with the local community whatsoever (since remedied).

Finally, can the Portfolio Holder also advise why a commitment to transfer allotments at Silverdale Terrace to the Parish Council in the summer of last year has not been completed almost one year later and further, why there is again no response to enquiries?

**MR ROBERT TINDALL** Portfolio Holder will reply:

I have checked on this matter with the Area Commissioner South who has looked into the position and advises that council officers are not aware of a Shropshire Council surveyor going out to the allotments at Hag Corner, Highley.

In respect of the transfer of allotments at Silverdale Terrace to the parish council, work has had to be undertaken to resolve a number of issues with the tenancy agreements before the transfer could be undertaken.

I am very pleased to say that the required work on the tenancy agreements has progressed sufficiently to enable the arrangements for the transfer of the allotments to now proceed.

**QUESTION 2**

**MR ALAN MOSLEY** will ask the following question:

The Policy and Performance Scrutiny recently received a report from the VCS following their Recession Impact Survey.

This found that:

“Over 48% of participants state their organisation has been negatively impacted between 2011 – 2012.

72% of participants had a slight/significant reduction in income

56% of participants had a slight/significant increase in expenditure”

It pointed out that the main factors were:

“Less funding from Shropshire Council and other public sector partners

Less national funding from all sources

Less income from users - general public/other organisations

Higher costs of operation

Grant funding is less abundant/available and there are fewer charitable donations being made.

The results show that levels of funding and other support and value of investments are static or decreasing, whereas, outgoings on staff, goods and services are increasing”

The survey gave details of a number of leading charities which have already had to close down while “78.1% of respondents saw an increase in vulnerable groups due to the recession. Of these groups, people with mental/physical health problems and people on low incomes are the most vulnerable.

72% of respondents have seen an increase in demand for their services with less funding to operate them with.”

Some charities quoted the 20% reduction in Shropshire Council grants as being highly significant in exacerbating their severe problems e.g. CAB, Headway.

One of the conclusions is that: “Shropshire Council needs to maintain an awareness of the fragility of the voluntary sector here in Shropshire and realise the knock on effect the cuts are having on both voluntary organisations and residents who use these services.”

Give the on-going depressed economic climate and the severe impact of changes in benefits to many of our residents in need, does the Leader believe that cuts to significant charities were misguided? Furthermore, will he explain how the Council will ensure that they are aware of the fragility of the sector and provide adequate resources to enable them and Council provision, to respond to the increasing demands of residents?

**MR GWILYM BUTLER**, Portfolio Holder will reply:

We’re grateful for the report from the Voluntary Sector Assembly and thank them for the really important impact they, and their member organisations have on life in Shropshire. With over 300 members, the Assembly plays a critical role in supporting volunteers, social enterprises and charities tackling issues as diverse as reversing the stigma associated with mental health conditions, through to giving young people a better voice in decision making.

This council recognised early on that changes in national policy, particularly around how public services are funded and delivered, would mean both opportunities for, as well as potential threats to the Voluntary Sector in Shropshire as elsewhere. So we got together with the Assembly to help make the best possible preparations for this new world. Recognising that tough choices would have to be made about continued grant funding from the council, we both wanted to invest now in creating as strong a sector as possible. This has helped create a sector that’s less reliant on vulnerable grant hand-outs and more able to win investment from the new range of commissioners –the council, the police and crime commissioner and clinical commissioning groups in health for example.

Under the leadership of Sonia Roberts, Assembly Chair, and Cllr Gwilym Butler as Portfolio Holder, a comprehensive programme – crucially designed by the sector, for the sector, was pulled together. Using a two year funding package of £180,000 granted from Shropshire Council, this has;

- a) Created the Shropshire Providers Consortium – supporting VCS organisations big and small to win commissioning tenders. In its first three months this has already gained 26 members and delivered its first tender.
- b) Strengthened the Assembly as a voice for the sector through support for Forums of Interest. Five new forums of interest have been developed (there are now 16 in total). The criminal justice forum has already met with the new Police and Crime Commissioner and successfully made the case for the critical role that VCS organisations can help play in the fight against crime
- c) Built new bridges between the voluntary and private sectors – with the recent Dragon’s Den event leading to enduring relationships between Shropshire business and voluntary organisations – for example between a community transport scheme and Stagecoach, helping develop commercial skills in community organisations as well as better opportunities for corporate social responsibility. The council’s own company, ip&e group has already committed to be a founder member for a new community social partnership as part of this work.

Since then, our locality commissioning approach is starting to work with local VCS organisations to better understand the role they play in their community. In Church Stretton, it’s clear that the Mayfair Centre for example plays an absolute central role in the lives of people – young and old – living in and around the town. By better understanding about how the council can support local community entrepreneurs, the people who make places like the Mayfair Centre tick, we believe we can help them thrive. As the questioner alludes, funding is tight and we know it’s going to get tighter, but we believe our approach is building a more resilient voluntary sector, better equipped to cope with an uncertain future.

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